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Landmarks Preservation Commission
February 20, 1968, Number 2
LP-0391

KREISCHER HOUSE, 4500 Arthur Kill Road, Staten Island. Built about 1885.

Landmark Site: Borough of Richmond Tax Map Block 7465, Lot 115.

On September 13, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Kreischer House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 80). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. The owner has indicated to the Commission support for the proposed designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

On a high landscaped knoll, overlooking the Arthur Kill, stands the extremely ornate and handsomely detailed Kreischer House. This impressive two and one-half story Victorian residence, designed in 1880, is a good example of frame construction executed in the so-called Stick style. Abounding in a variety of jig-saw ornament, this profusely decorated House is dominated by a three-story polygonal tower asymmetrically placed at the corner and by an imposing balcony at the top floor with a projecting gable overhang. In its abundant use of applied decoration and in its style, the picturesque quality of this architectural fantasy evokes memories of Mississippi river boats.

The mansion is partially encircled by an old-fashioned veranda which follows the polygonal form of the base of the tower, thus accentuating it. The porch roof is supported on delicately executed posts, widely spaced and carrying an ornate railing. This railing, composed of diamond-shaped panels set between vertical and horizontal members of wood, is one of the most ornamental features of the House. The main entrance at the side of the House has handsomely paneled doors serving as a welcoming feature to this unusual residence.

Decorative patterns and forms were used extensively in the tower and the top floor balcony and above a vertical-slat wood railing with cutout forms. A delicately detailed wrought iron guard rail adds an interesting contrast to the character of this wood structure. The uppermost story of the tower is open and has a handsome series of arches between columns with brackets supporting the cornice of the polygonal roof above. The overhanging gable of the attic balcony is supported by two diagonal brackets. This gable and the triangular panels beneath it are enhanced by jig-saw filigree designs freely interlaced, and with their slat railing they remind us of a Nineteenth Century Swiss chalet.

Historical Significance

In 1874, when Balthasar Kreischer erected his brick manufacturing factory in the relatively undeveloped region of Staten Island, known as Androvetteville, the establishment of the New York Fire-Brick and Staten Island Clay Retort Works led to the development of the community. It has the distinction of its being one of the Island's earliest industrial centers. Because of Kreischer's commercial activities, the community became known as Kreischerville, and the area was soon known as the "boom town" of Staten Island.

Using clay from the rich deposits nearby, the Kreischer factory produced facing and fire-brick, roofing tiles, ornamental moldings and objects, such as garden urns and figures. The terra cotta decoration at Barnard College, the ceramic construction materials and bricks used in the building of Saint Luke's Hospital and the large outdoor gray ceramic urns at Columbia University were made at his Staten Island plant.

When the retort works was in operation Mr. Kreischer is said to have considered the town a family community and to have urged his employees to keep their yards and houses neat, thus adding to the attractiveness of the community. He assisted his employees during periods of adversity, and he advanced them money for the purchase of their homes.

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FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Kreischer House has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Kreischer House is an excellent example of frame construction executed in the Stick style and that the House stands as a memorial to a man who played an important role in the industrial expansion of Staten Island and who, in addition to the industrial development of Kreischerville, promoted the social welfare and advancement of the community.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 8-A of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Kreischer House, 4500 Arthur Kill Road, Staten Island and designates Tax Map Block 7465, Lot 115, Borough of Richmond, as its Landmark Site.